DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 211 CS 003 261

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TITLE Standards for Evaluating Book Reports.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association World Congress on Reading (6th, Singapore, August 17-19, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bibliotherapy; *Book Reviews; *Composition (Literary); *Critical Reading; Elementary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; Foreign Countries; Language Arts; *Reading Comprehension
IDENTIFIERS *Japan

ABSTRACT

This report discusses the present state of guidance in the writing of book reports by children in Japan, the basic factors considered in proposing standards for book reports, and standards suggested for evaluating book reports. Many different book-report contests are held each year in Japan, and some contests are conducted on a scale large enough to receive entries from about two million children. A survey conducted of representative teachers from all over Japan indicated that the most prevalent type of report is a simple record of impressions and thoughts that occur upon reading a book. In order to initiate critical reading, it is suggested that the teacher emphasize three points in guiding the student: (1) evaluation encouraging independent thinking that develops sequentially through simple reaction, comprehension, self-judgment, revision of attitidues, and self-improvement; (2) evaluation which covers the overall scope of reading activities; and (3) assessment of self-expression. Two charts have been prepared for use in evaluating book reports. Chart 1 indicates evaluation standards for reading guidance and chart 2 indicates evaluation standards for composition guidance. (MKM)

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Standards for Evaluating Book Reports

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Note: The term, "book report," refers to "dokusho kansobun" in Japanese, and it means an essay type report of impressions and thoughts on a book.

I. The Present State of Guidance in the Writing of Book Reports in Japan

In Japan, most of the children upon entering primary school can already read the unique phonetic symbols called "hiragana". Within the year, they are able to read easy books. Because of this, the reading ability of primary and middle school children is quite advanced. Every primary school pupil has had the experience of writing a book report after reading a book. Many different book report contests are held each year. For the most part, primary school children's entries reach about 1,200 characters, while middle school pupils' are about 2,000 characters in length. (2,000 Japanese characters are the equivalent of about 1,000 words in English.) Some of these contests are contacted on a large scale with entries from about two million children.

Guidance in writing book reports is extensive. However there seem to be certain problems with the book reports themselves. Below are the results of a questionaire, which asked, "Of the following, which type is most prevalent in children's book reports?" in a survey recently conducted of representative teachers from all over Japan.

TABLE 1

	primary school(%)	middle school(%)	Total (%)
A. Simple writing down of impressions and thoughts that occur upon reading a book	51.4	45.4	48.4
B. Report centered on comprehension of the book	23.8	20.9	22.3
C. Report on thoughts upon reading the book	19.0	25.5	22.3
D. Decision to revise one's own thoughts and deeds	2.9	6.4	4.6
E. Report on improving oneself	2.9	0.9	1.9

This data clearly shows the actual state of students' book reports. The fact that item "A", simple writing down of impressions and thoughts that occur upon reading a book," accounts for approximately half, proves the shallowness of book reports. It also shows that "reading to make one think" is not a factor to the writers of the book reports.

This means that in Japan, guidance in reading books places too much emphasis on the nurturing of reading habits and the developing of limits and areas covered. It can be simply interpreted to mean that not enough effort has been extended to the development of initiating thinking, and the development of sentiment. Furthermore, the actual analysis of book reports written by primary and middle school pupils has resulted in conclusions which are not quite so bad, but indicate a similar tendency.

The fact that book reports in Japan have not reached a higher level presents a major problem. One of the reasons cores from a lack of proper guidance in developing children's thinking, even though there is active guidance to motivate the writing of book reports. This in turn also evidences the lack of any guidance after the book reports have been written. Assessment standards are ambiguous concerning how book reports should be evaluated.

II. The basic factors for establishing standards for book report

In evaluating book reports, the teacher responsible for the necessary guidance should not fail to emphasize the following three points;

1. Evaluation should encourage independent thinking and growth of the mind of the reader himself.

I believe that book reports can be classified into the following five categories. These five are nearly identical to the five types indicated in the previously mentioned survey.

A. The Stage of Simple Reaction: This refers to the simple writing down of impressions and thoughts that randomly occur upon reading a book, or writing down one's thoughts and/or feeling roughly following the plot.

B. The Stage of Understanding the Contents: Questioning what was written in the book in order to derive certain answers in an efforts to understand the contents of the book.

C. The Stage of Self-Judgement: Gaining new understanding and knowledge from reading the book, and as a result, endeavoring to change one's personal ideas, thereby deepening the contents of such personal understanding. At this stage, efforts are confined to a passive understanding of the contents of the book.

D. The Stage of Revision of Attitudes: Rather than a passive acceptance of the theme and contents of the book, efforts are made to aggressively take up the problems as something of the reader's own concern, and endeavering to positively change one's own thoughts and actions accordingly. When this stage is reached, the form of argumentative text has a definite attraction to the reader of the report.

E. The Stage of Evolution of the Individual: At this stage, the reader not only changes his own understandings upon reading the book, but also writes about how his daily life is consequently improved. When this stage is reached, the contents of the book reports often coincides with the witer's actual daily life.

These five categories follow the growth of the mind of the readers. In fact, however, most of our middle school children rarely develop to the stage beyond the level indicated in stage C. After ascertaining at what stage a specific child has reached, guidance is, of course, then necessary to encourage progress towards the following stages.

2. Evaluation should cover the overall scope of reading activities.

One is apt to consider the evaluation of a book report when we mention "evaluation of book reports,"

but that is erroneous. All children themselves continue to read books and as their reading pregresses, they experience new emotions which lead to the growth of new ideas and ways of thinking so that it becomes necessary to undertake evaluations based on observations of the children's overall reading activities. In order to do that, one must consider the categories of books, the ease or difficulty of understanding of books, reading habits, the evolution of evaluations made on the book reports, etc.

3. The overall assessment of self-expression

The quality of book reports is directly related to the ability to express oneself. This is because the evaluation of book reports is centered on the aspects of the growth of the human mind of the children. Evaluation of expression is undertaken with regard to the style, the construction, and spelling.

It is my firm belief that it is most important to place an organic relationship on the three points of observation mentioned above in the evaluation of book reports.

III. Standards for Evaluating Book Reports

On the basis of this basic position outlined previously, the following two charts have been prepared. Chart 1 indicates evaluation standards applicable to reading guidance, while Chart 2 indicates evaluation standards for composition guidance. In actual practice, at the time of evaluating each individual book report, it will suffice to determine evaluation points in accordance with the points of guidance selected.

Chart 1

Standards for Evaluating Book Reports (A)

	Evaluation Items	Evaluation Grades
Awareness of Problems	(1) Theme	0. - nil 1. - low 2. - high 3. - evolution
	(2) Sympathy	0. - nil 1. - low 2. - high 3. - very encouraging
Reading Habits	(3) Categories of Books	o. - biased 1. - several categories 2. - well ballanced
	(4) Degree of Difficulty of Books	0. - too easy 1. - too difficult 2. - appropriate
	(5) Reading Time	0. - only on special occasion 1. - fluctuating 2. - specifically established
	(6) Evolution of Evaluation	0. - no changes 1. - not particulary evident 2. - very prominent

Chart 2

Standards for Evaluating Book Reports (B)

	Evaluation Items	Evaluation Grades
Style	(7) Writing Style	0. - sporadic 1. - explanatory text 2. - self-questioning and answering 3. - editorial text
	(8) Awareness of Style	0. - not consistent 1. - consistent 2. - affective
Construction of Paragraphs	(9) Awareness of Paragraphs	0. - nil 1. - one paragraph 2. - paragraphed by meaning 3. - paragraphed by main and supporting themes
	(10) Logical consistency	0. - many illogical sentences 1. - a few illogical sentences 2. - correct
	(11) Words and Phrases	0. - explanatory words 1. - emotional words 2. - rational words 3. - affective words
Spelling	(12) Kanji (Chinese characters)	0. - profuse errors 1. - a few errors 2. - correct
	(13) Hiragana	0. - profuse errors 1. - a few errors 2. - correct
	(14) Punctuation	0. - profuse errors 1. - a few errors 2. - correct

AWARENESS OF PROBLEMS

Thematic: The theme referred to here concerns the presence of a theme in a book report. Depending upon the degree of awareness of problems, the four stages can be applied to the five categories of book reports in the following manner;

0. - No main subject - The Stage of Simple Reactions (A1 thru A4)

1. - Low awareness of subject - The Stage of Understanding the Contents (B1 thru B4)

2. - Highly aware of subject - The Stage of Self-Judgement (C1 thru C4)

3. - Living reality - The Stage of Revision of Attitudes or The Stage of Evolution of the individual (D1 thru E4)

The numerals, 0 - 3, indicate the differences in grading.

The five categories of book reports are sub-divided respectively into four different categories so that there are altogether twenty types.

A. The Stage of Simple Reactions

A1. "Random listing of impressions" type

A2. "General outline" type

A3. "Simple moral" type

A4. "Inspiring impressions" type

B. The Stage of understanding the Contents

B1. "Plot reporting" type

B2. "Understanding of author" type

B3. "Understanding of hero and heroine" type

B4. "Simple critique" type

C. The Stage of Self-Judgement

C1. "Awareness of current situation" type

C2. "Knowledge learning" type

C3. "Experience comparing" type

C4. "Reality critique" type

D. The Stage of Revision of Attitudes

D1. "Theme contemplating" type

D2. "Awareness revising" type

D3. "Author evaluating" type

D4. "Culture critique" type

E. The Stage of Evolution of the Individual

E1. "Life-style evolutionary" type

E2. "Philosophy evolutionary" type

E3. "Author probing" type

E4. "Personality evolutionary" type